

REMARKS

Please reconsider the application in view of the above amendments and the following remarks. Applicant thanks the Examiner for carefully considering this application.

Priority Document

The Examiner has indicated that none of certified copies of the priority documents have been received from the International Bureau. However, Applicant respectfully notes that the present application is a national phase of a PCT application. Thus, the USPTO should have received the certified copies of the priority documents from the International Bureau. Applicant notes that, if the certified copies have not been received, it is the responsibility of the USPTO to request the documents from the International Bureau.

Disposition of Claims

Claims 2-13 and 16-25 are currently pending in this application. Claim 25 is independent. The remaining claims depend, directly or indirectly, from claim 25.

Rejection(s) under 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 25, 2, 3, and 9 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Japanese Patent Publication No. 1-151681 (“Furumoto”). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Referring to Figs. 21 and 22 as an example, the guide apparatus according to one of more embodiments of the claimed invention guides a movement of a plurality of doors 3 with respect to a main body 1. The guide apparatus includes a plurality of rotatable rails 81. Each of the plurality of rotatable rails 81 includes three regions for supporting a roller 88 of the door 3: a supporting surface 82a, an auxiliary track 82b, and an additional track 81x that is parallel to the

auxiliary track 82b. At a first rotation position of the rotatable rail 81, the roller 88 is positioned on the supporting surface 82a, while at a second rotation position of the rotatable rail 81, the roller 88 is positioned on the auxiliary track 82b, and the auxiliary track 82b of one door 3 becomes continuous with an additional track 81x of a rotatable rail 81 of another door 3.

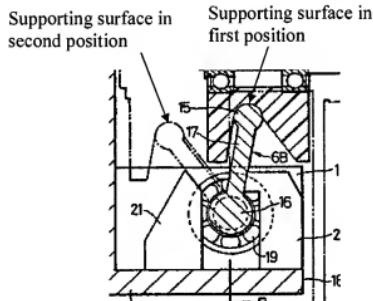
Thus, when one rotatable rail 81 at the first rotation position is adjacent to another rotatable rail 81 at a second rotation position, the one rotatable rail 81 can support one door 3 on the supporting face 82a, and can concurrently receive a second door 3 from the another rotatable rail 81 on the additional track 81x, because the additional track 81x of the one rotatable rail is continuous with the auxiliary track 82b of the another rotatable rail. That is, one rotatable rail 81 can support two doors in an overlapping manner. The claimed invention allows for high degree of freedom in moving doors from rail to rail. For example, if there are four adjacent doors (“Door A, Door B, Door C, Door D”) on four adjacent rotatable rails (“Rail A, Rail B, Rail C, Rail D”), Door B can be moved to Rail A, Door D can be moved to Rail B, then Door B can be moved to Rail D, such that the door arrangement is changed from ABCD to ADCB.

Accordingly, claim 25 requires, in part, “each of said plurality of rotatable rails includes a supporting surface, an auxiliary track, and an additional track parallel to said auxiliary track,” “in said first rotation position, each of said plurality of rotatable rails supports a corresponding one of said plurality of doors in said set position by making said roller ride on said supporting surface,” “in said second rotation position, each of said plurality of rotatable rails supports a corresponding one of said plurality of doors in said preparation position by making said roller ride on said auxiliary track,” and “when one of two adjacent ones of said plurality of rotatable rails is in said second rotation position, said auxiliary track of said one of two adjacent

ones of said plurality of rotatable rails is continuous with said additional track of the other of said two adjacent ones of said plurality of rotatable rails in said first rotation position."

The Examiner asserts that the rail 6B of Furumoto reads on the rotatable rail of the claimed invention, and that different sides of the rail bar 15 of the rail 6B read on the supporting surface, auxiliary track, and the additional track of the claimed invention. Specifically, the Examiner asserts that the upper side of the rail bar 15 reads on the supporting surface, the left side of the rail bar 15 reads on the auxiliary track, and that the right side of the rail bar 15 reads on the additional track.

However, as clearly shown in Fig. 3 of Furumoto, reproduced in part below, only a single portion of the rail bar 15 acts as a supporting surface of the roller 5 for each of the two respective positions. Thus, it would be unreasonable to construe the rail bar 15 as having a supporting surface, an auxiliary track, and an additional track. Thus, Furumoto fails to show or suggest at least "each of said plurality of rotatable rails includes a supporting surface, an auxiliary track, and an additional track parallel to said auxiliary track," as required by the claim.



Furthermore, the Examiner asserts that it would be obvious to adjacently arrange two rails of Furumoto, with one in a first position and the other in a second position. However,

claim 25 requires that the auxiliary track of one rotatable rail in a second rotation position be continuous with the additional track of another adjacent rotatable rail in a first rotation position. Because the rail bar 15 of Furumoto moves in a front-rear direction from the first position to the second position, none of the surfaces of a rail bar 15 of a first rail 6B in a first position would be continuous with a surface of rail bar 15 of an adjacently disposed second rail in a second position. This is because, as clearly shown in Fig. 3 of Furumoto reproduced above, there is absolutely no overlap of the rail bar 15 between the first and second positions. Thus, the rail 6B of Furumoto cannot simultaneously support two doors, as is the case with the claimed invention. Furumoto, therefore, fails to show or suggest at least “when one of two adjacent ones of said plurality of rotatable rails is in said second rotation position, said auxiliary track of said one of two adjacent ones of said plurality of rotatable rails is continuous with said additional track of the other of said two adjacent ones of said plurality of rotatable rails in said first rotation position,” as required by the claim.

In view of the above, claim 25 is patentable over Furumoto, at least for the above reasons. Claims 2, 3, and 9 depend from claim 25. Thus, claims 2, 3 and 9 are patentable over Furumoto, at least for the same reasons as claim 25. Accordingly, withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

Claims 10, 11, 13-15, 18-22, and 24 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Furumoto in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,926,342 (“Pommerer”). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

As explained above, claim 25 is patentable over Furumoto. Pommerer fails to supply that which Furumoto lacks with respect to claim 25. That is, Pommerer fails to show or suggest at least “each of said plurality of rotatable rails includes a supporting surface, an

auxiliary track, and an additional track parallel to said auxiliary track," "in said first rotation position, each of said plurality of rotatable rails supports a corresponding one of said plurality of doors in said set position by making said roller ride on said supporting surface," "in said second rotation position, each of said plurality of rotatable rails supports a corresponding one of said plurality of doors in said preparation position by making said roller ride on said auxiliary track," and "when one of two adjacent ones of said plurality of rotatable rails is in said second rotation position, said auxiliary track of said one of two adjacent ones of said plurality of rotatable rails is continuous with said additional track of the other of said two adjacent ones of said plurality of rotatable rails in said first rotation position," as required by claim 25. Instead, Pommerer discloses only a single door and a single rail.

In view of the above, claim 25 is patentable over Furumoto and Pommerer, whether considered separately or in combination, at least for the above reasons. 10, 11, 13-15, 18-22, and 24 depend, either directly or indirectly, from claim 25. Thus, claims 10, 11, 13-15, 18-22, and 24 are patentable over Furumoto and Pommerer, at least for the same reasons as claim 25.

Additionally, claim 10 requires, in part, "a support bracket is rotatably connected to said corresponding one of said plurality of doors in such a way that said support bracket rotates about a second rotation axis parallel to said first rotation axis; and said roller is supported in said support bracket."

The Examiner admits that Furumoto fails to show or suggest the above limitations of claim 10, but asserts that Pommerer teaches the above limitations. However, in contrast to the support bracket of claim 10, which rotates about a second rotation axis extending horizontally parallel to the first rotation axis of the rail, the bracket of Pommerer rotates about a

vertical axis. Thus, in addition to its dependency from claim 25, claim 10 is patentable over Furumoto and Pommerer, whether considered separately or in combination, at least for the above additional reasons.

Additionally, claim 11 requires, in part, "said roller is of a disc shape and is turnably supported in a distal end portion of said support bracket, so that said roller lies with a side surface thereof abutting said supporting surface of said receiving groove when said rotatable rail is in said first rotation position and said roller stands up with a circumferential surface thereof abutting said auxiliary track when said rotatable rail is in said second rotation position."

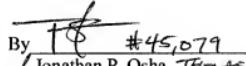
The Examiner asserts that Pommerer teaches the above limitations of claim 11. However, in contrast to bracket of claim 11, Pommerer fails to show or suggest a roller of a disc shape that can lie down and stand up. Thus, in addition to its dependency from claim 25, claim 11 is patentable over Furumoto and Pommerer, whether considered separately or in combination, at least for the above additional reasons. Accordingly, withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

Conclusion

Applicant believes this reply is fully responsive to all outstanding issues and places this application in condition for allowance. If this belief is incorrect, or other issues arise, the Examiner is encouraged to contact the undersigned or his associates at the telephone number listed below. Please apply any charges not covered, or any credits, to Deposit Account 50-0591 (Reference Number 12088/039001).

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Respectfully submitted,

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